

## OPPORTUNITY AND EQUITY GAPS IN ROMANIA – WHAT DO EARLY INDICATORS REVEAL FOR THE FALL OF 2020?

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### Abstract

*The COVID-19 pandemic has not only risen hurdles for the health care industry and economy evolution, it also contributed significantly to the growing inequality. The research analyzes preliminary impact of coronavirus pandemic on the Romanian economy revealing that there is clear evidence, showing that the groups of people are not equally affected by the pandemic. An up-to date analysis and literature review are conducted using available data sources. Synthesis from Romania research records, suggests as in other European countries, that COVID-19 throws into relief economic effects which associate with inequality factors among groups. In this context, some key policy responses and measures are discussed to mitigate opportunity and equity gaps. Whether a consequence of economy, related to gender, education, health or other type, the observed inequalities in the pandemic context are pervasive.*

**Key words:** COVID-19; inequality; opportunity; equity gaps

### 1. Introduction

In the last decade, increasing efforts were made by the state, local authorities, employers and other actors, to reduce the equity gaps in education, employment and health. In this regard the focus was on several policy mechanisms (Deloitte, 2020) to raise the standard across these industries and support business organizations. Although in the last 4 years Romanian economy developed, further improvement in governance is needed to address the business climate and the remaining transition gaps (EBRD, 2020). However, early transformation signs of the Romanian society were characterized by the lack of transparency in the health system (Andrei et al., 2009a) or in the public administration (Andrei et al., 2009b), revealing a complex phenomenon to be addressed. Moreover, the absence of adequate education legislation during transition, caused serious discrepancies on which there is no fast response (Andrei et al., 2010).

While most of the major cities (Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara, Sibiu) implemented policies on social-economic development favoring their local communities (The World Bank, 2020) another group of small cities such as Oradea, Reșița, Alba-Iulia and Tur-

da envisioned development through investments under the umbrella of the European funds and quickly become initiative models.

In order to support the modernization of the Romanian economy and to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 recovery, government and policy makers should focus resiliency policies on supporting the companies and business owners addressing production, innovation process and technological advancement. Indeed, the economic effects of COVID-19 in Romania may widen the equity gaps, thus effective harmonized strategies are necessary to be implemented favoring a mixed environment of socio-economic measures. Although some measures of movement restriction impacted mostly some areas of the economy, other measures such as the extended shift towards online schooling may reveal future vulnerabilities in terms of unknown impact for the development of children across several generations, widening further the gap between the rich and the poor.

In Romania the first case of coronavirus COVID-19 was detected in 26 February 2020. The state of emergency brought many changes to the labor market and to the economic activity as a whole. During the period between 16 March and 16 May the freedom of movement, mobility rights and some aspects of economic freedom were affected by government laws and regulations (Legislative Portal, 2020). Many economic activities were hit hard by the heavy restrictions implemented in the wake of Coronavirus outbreak. Work from home, where possible changed the perspective for the business in Romania and proved to be an effective solution to protect jobs and workers. The outcome of these measures is hard to be quantified on the long run thus more data is necessary to be available to assess their economic impact.

## 2. Methodology

The present study proposes to reveal insights to the following questions:

1. Are some groups of people more likely to lose their jobs because of COVID-19 incidence?
2. Are some groups of people more likely to be tested/diagnosed with COVID-19 infection?
3. What are the social determinants driving the equity gaps that may impact disparities among groups of people because of COVID-19 incidence?

Data with regard to inequities generated by the COVID-19 pandemic in Romania (accessed 14 Nov 2020) were retrieved from National Institute of Statistics, World Health Organization and World Vision Romania. The World Vision data originates from research conducted between May and June 2020 through the use of statistical survey with parents of children in school engaged in World Vision Romania projects, school wardens and local authorities' representatives. The World Vision data is structured on 6 counties in Romania where the foundation operates.

A scoping search was conducted to identify the relevant studies related to the defined research questions. As these studies were conducted on a pandemic context it is relevant to point out that some limitations may exist within the research field.

## 3. Results

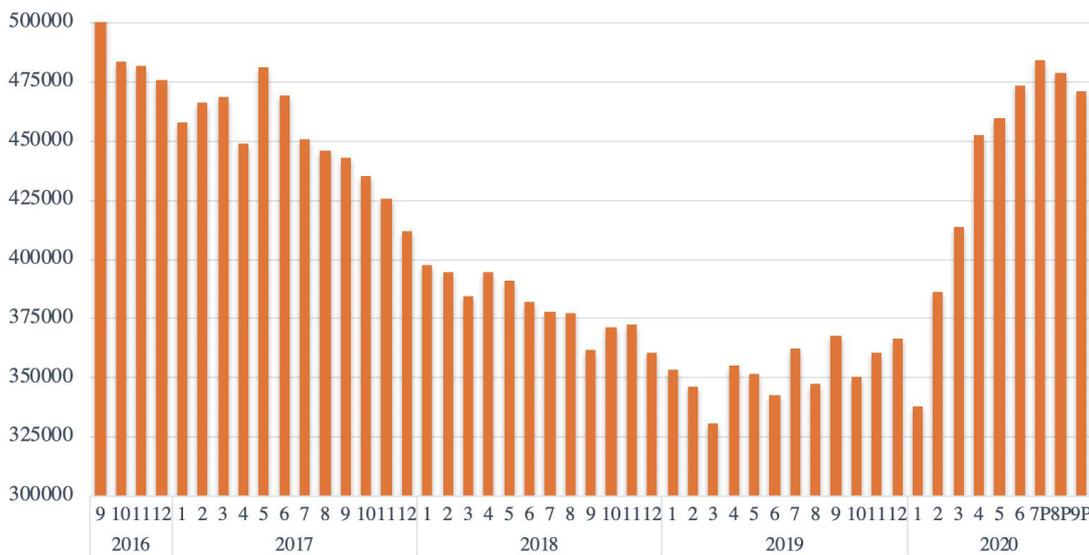
At the moment, for Romania there are available a handful of indicators that show insights into the pandemic effect on equity in the fall and forward. For this reason, the full impact of COVID-19 in many aspects is not fully understood. Despite growing uncertainty on

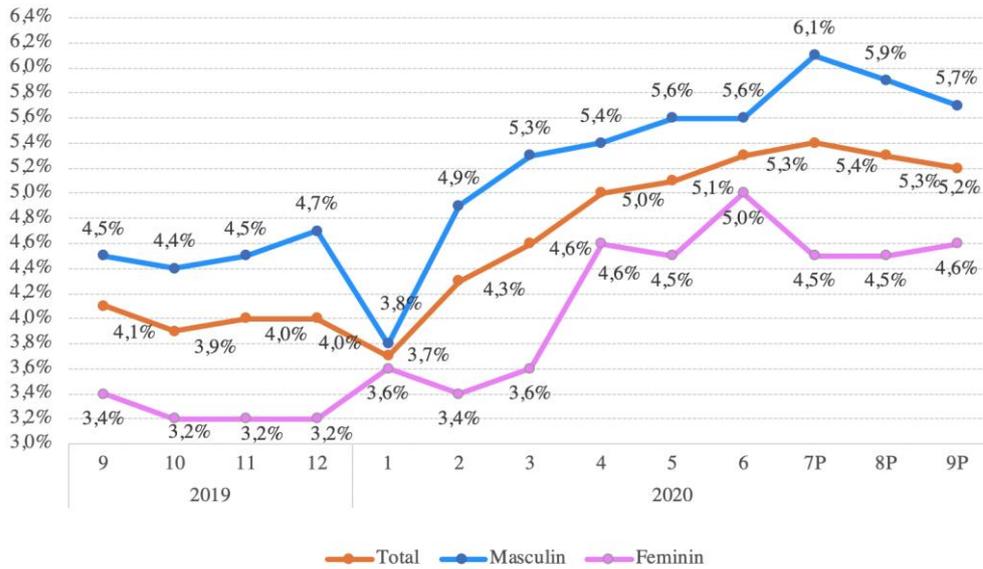
the economy and the polarization phenomenon that generates equity gaps, more than ever it is important to focus on the fundamentals. Nevertheless, it is advisable that the economy be adjusted to a more sustainable foundation to permit faster progress and look to ample global opportunities.

In order to response effectively to the COVID-19 crisis understanding its differential effect on men and women is mandatory (UN Women, 2020). This effort in supporting gender analysis with accuracy generates evidence which may to be included in the framework response and strategies which address the COVID-19 economic effects.

Figure 1 shows the most recent data on the number of unemployed persons in Romania from the National Institute of Statistics. As can be observed in August 2020, the number of unemployed persons aged 15-74 is predicted with a first decrease compared with previous month, continuing to drop in September. A smooth economic recovery is expected as long as the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic is contained. It is noted that the slight decrease in the number of unemployed may be due to the relaxation of the restriction and gradual restart of the economic activities.

In spite of relaxation strategies to preserved jobs and active support families the number of unemployed from September 2020 is much higher than in the same month of 2017.





**Figure 2.** Unemployment rate by gender in Romania, September 2019-September 2020

**Source:** National Institute of Statistics

**Note:** monthly BIM unemployment in accordance with the standards of the International Labor Office; P = Provisional data

Research studies suggests different exposure to SARS-Cov-2 between men and women (Gebhard et al., 2020). Figure 3 presents the COVID-19 global cases in Romania disaggregated by sex and age. Emerging evidence from Romania demonstrating that the number of cases in men and women are similar, pointed out resemblance with the gender distribution in European countries, in line with the visual results plotted in Figure 3. The gender-disaggregated data show that 51% of the confirmed cases are men. On the other hand, the fatality rate is higher in aged man (UN Women, 2020b).

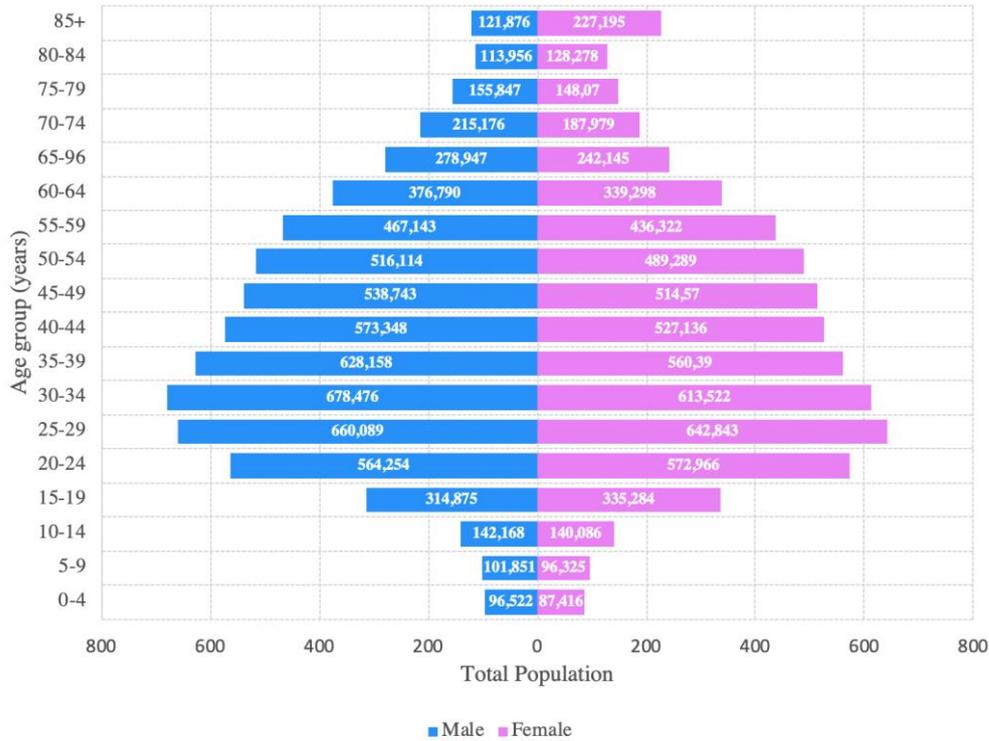
The data from the World Vision (2020) survey shows that under COVID-19 pandemic the children welfare – material, emotional and educational – in rural is reverse proportional with the degree of vulnerability of the family. Furthermore, it highlights economic difficulties revealing income decrease encountered by one out of five families during the pandemic.

Also, the survey results pointed out that 40% from the rural students did not attend online classes. In this regard, Figure 4 exhibits the proportion of children who attended online classes based on the data from the World Vision Romania report (2020).

By inspecting the plot, it can be concluded that 59% of the children attended online classes, 4% of children never participated and 1% of the children had no willing to connect to online classes. A thirty percent of the children did not attend online classes, but they did their homework. Also, although they did their homework, 16% of the children encountered difficulties in sending them.

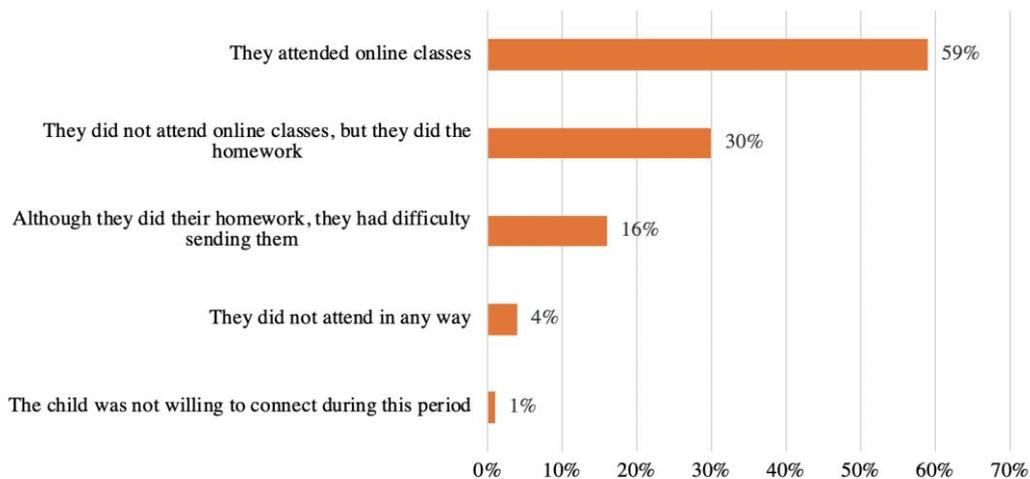
Since the restriction were enforced in Romania under the COVID-19 pandemic, it was observed that communities from the rural areas and the ones impacted by high-poverty have no access to proper internet connectivity as in the urban areas. The data reveals a sizable schooling access gap between the rural and urban areas. A problematic aspect is not only the remote schooling and internet connectivity, but some cases are also affected by the lack of parental competences resulting in poor guidance as a whole for the children that

miss out face to face human interaction in school, phenomenon reflected more frequent in the disadvantaged socioeconomic groups.



**Figure 3.** COVID-19 global cases, disaggregated by sex and age (cumulative, provisional) in Romania

Source: WHO (2020-11-01)



**Figure 4.** Participation of students in formal education during the state of emergency in Romania (%)

Source: World Vision Romania

Note: data collection May-June 2020

Furthermore, it is important to note that parent's job loss in the pandemic context affects negatively the children's education and increase the rate of children in poverty. In this regard COVID-19 added its contribution to the already existing educational disparities between reach and poor.

#### 4. Discussions and concluding remarks

The coronavirus outbreak disrupted the European and global economies. In this regard a major concern and priority are the health and the safety of general population. Countries have already introduced or are introducing economic packages, liquidities, new social welfare payments and policy measures to help increase the capacity of their health systems and support those citizens and companies to cope up with the economic effects of COVID-19 pandemic.

The main findings of the research highlight the risk of COVID-19 pandemic to increase inequality between groups in Romania. The paper concludes that the unemployment rate in Romania reverted to the level of three years ago based on the analyzed data from the National Institute of Statistics. After a series of activities were resumed step by step as a result of the ease in the measures enforced to prevent the spread of COVID-19 pandemic, the number of the unemployed decreased to 471,346 in September 2020 from 478,987 in August and 484,156 in July. Although these measured obtained positive results the number of unemployed in September is still above the recorded value obtained a year before.

The consequences of the pandemic are visible and strongly affect the labor force. The unemployment rate among men was 5.7% compering with 4.6% among women. Unfortunately, part of the damage done is irreversible and has severe implications in generating gender inequalities across different economic sectors. Since employment was sharply affected, governments and business companies, must evaluate and take valuable measurements as soon as possible. Saving jobs and securing businesses by protecting the critical economic sectors and connecting citizens to the local offer are vital for sustaining the Romanian economy.

Although, the COVID-19 pandemic impact varies across groups it relies on several factors. Gender appears to be very important in explaining significant social characteristics differences for population in the way that the virus impacts everyday life. Special consideration should be given to the gender-disaggregated data. Understanding the relation between global health outcomes and gender should be seen as an effective component of valuable information to address better policies in real time. The present paper sees data disaggregation grouped by dimension, such as gender, age, education, ethnicity, or other socio-economic variables as of utmost importance during the pandemic to underline trends and patterns. Disaggregated data analysis enables governments to adjust interventions and policies shielding vulnerable groups. The thematic area of SDG commitment "no one is left behind" (UN, 2015) is now more relevant than ever.

Focusing on children education, the switch from face-to-face to online learning caused by COVID-19 on the long run generated harmful effects on vulnerable children. These negative contributions are not immediately measurables. Thus, this costly policy measure to maintain the closure for the schools and childcare, is expected to have long-term consequences on the human capital and future earnings and welfare of an entire generation of

affected children. Committing to keep schools and childcare centers open can play an essential role in ensuring the fair opportunities that every child deserves should be considered. Even though it may add some variance to the transmission of COVID-19 infections, on the long run such measures add more benefits outweighing the risks.

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## “SEASONAL ADJUSTMENT” IN GOOGLE SCHOLAR AND MICROSOFT ACADEMIC

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### Abstract

*The aim of the present paper was to explore the visibility of the concept of “seasonal adjustment” with regard to research field, using the Publish or Perish 7 tool. The online scientific databases analyzed were Google Scholar and Microsoft Academic. Furthermore, the compared analysis provides consistent findings which will help the researchers to better explore this topic and some useful recommendations regarding the use of these databases for retrieving articles on seasonal adjustment will be pointed out.*

**Keywords:** *seasonal adjustment; academic visibility; Google Scholar; Microsoft Academic*